

Contact Centre Aspirations for Improved Performance Measurement and Management

Everyone knows that contact centre activities are highly measurable, using a plethora of KPIs.

Yet little is known about where contact centre managers currently see themselves in the important field of performance measurement and management (PM&M) in terms of excellence on a spectrum from poor to outstanding. Nor is much known about future aspirations or intended timescales for improvement.

Alan Meekings and Simon Povey of Landmark Consulting and Paul Weald of ProtoCall One report on a recent survey that explored perceptions and aspirations in this important field.

Introduction

To understand where contact centre managers currently see themselves in the Performance Measurement and Management (PM&M) field, we designed an innovative, self-assessment survey that was completed online by respondents spanning a wide range of contact centres, by size and sector, ranging from large contact centres serving millions of customers to a unique provider of contact centre services to the third sector in the UK.

This survey revealed not only how respondents currently view their current status in the PM&M field but also their aspirations over the coming year.

Each respondent was invited to rate their current status and future aspirations against a four-level scale, ranging from Level 1 (Reactive) to Level 4 (Insightful), across seven dimensions:

- (1) Performance measures and KPIs;
- (2) Performance management within the contact centre;
- (3) Performance planning processes;
- (4) Responsibility for managing performance;
- (5) Goals and target-setting;
- (6) Clarity and accessibility of performance information; and
- (7) Performance management culture.

Findings

Perhaps the most striking finding from this survey is the stark contrast between current reality and future aspirations.

Figure 1 (below) illustrates that most contact centres currently see themselves as operating between Levels 1 (Reactive) and 2 (Defensive).

This self-assessment looks like an objective reflection of current reality – especially as we know that many contact centres still work on the basis of KPIs that are neither genuinely customer-centric nor adequately capture the contribution of contact centres to overall, end-to-end organisational performance.

In contrast, an overwhelming majority of respondents see themselves as operating at either Level 3 (Proactive) or Level 4 (Insightful) within 12 months.

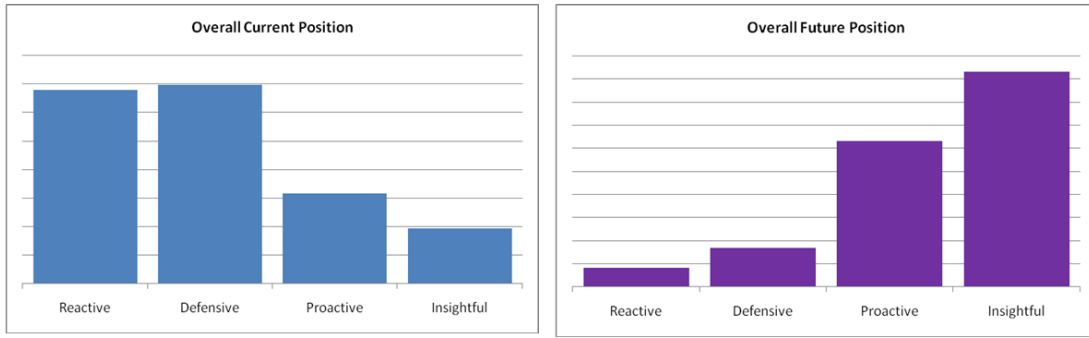


Figure 1. Distribution of Current and Aspirational Maturity

At face value, this could be seen as an unrealistic assessment of likely progress. Even though we know from experience that this level of improvement is achievable, it is only achievable if informed by new thinking.

So, it's worth exploring these perceptions in more detail.

In this context, the two specific dimensions which exhibited the biggest disparity between current reality and future aspirations were:

- Performance Measures and KPIs; and
- Responsibility for Managing Performance

Performance Measures and KPIs

To understand thinking around Performance Measures and KPIs in more detail, it's worth mentioning the characteristics in our maturity model concerning this specific dimension:

<p>Level 1 – Reactive</p> <p>We mainly use call-handling measures from the ACD, such as average-handling-time, time-to-answer, abandonment rate, service level performance, etc.</p>	<p>Level 2 – Defensive</p> <p>We use a basket of industry standard efficiency and effectiveness KPIs that include revenue, conversion rate, first call resolution, customer satisfaction.</p>
<p>Level 3 – Proactive</p> <p>We have derived a systemic set of KPIs that reflect our overall goals, including objectives beyond the contact centre, such as adherence to brand message.</p>	<p>Level 4 – Insightful</p> <p>Our KPIs are based around the customer experience, including direct feedback from customers. We share responsibility for these KPIs with other parts of the business, such as marketing and delivery.</p>

Responses to our survey suggest that many contact centres are currently aspiring to implement a systemic set of KPIs, including direct feedback from customers, and also participate in a programme of joined-up thinking and improvement with stakeholders across other parts of the business, notably marketing and service delivery.

If so, we warmly welcome and applaud this approach.

Responsibility for Managing Performance

In terms of Responsibility for Managing Performance, 72% of respondents rated their current maturity at either Levels 1 or 2, whereas 71% expected to be advancing to Levels 3 or 4 within 12 months.

The characteristics by maturity level for this particular dimension are as follows:

<p>Level 1 – Reactive</p> <p>Either supervisors or a central quality assurance team are responsible for managing individual performance. We have a separate performance reporting function that generates and distributes standard reports on business KPIs.</p>	<p>Level 2 – Defensive</p> <p>In addition to supervisors managing performance on a day-to-day basis, contact centre managers are responsible for optimising customer service. They are required to provide regular updates on potential improvements against key contact centre KPIs.</p>
<p>Level 3 – Proactive</p> <p>We have a clear multi-level structure in which groups of supervisors and managers come together to review and make collective decisions affecting performance within both the contact centre and the rest of the business.</p>	<p>Level 4 – Insightful</p> <p>Our contact centre is fully integrated into overall business performance planning and improvement. All levels of management have an explicit, interlinked role in performance planning and improvement.</p>

This implies that most contact centres are aspiring to put in place a clear, multi-level structure for managing performance, where contact centres are fully integrated into organisation-wide improvement initiatives.

Again, we warmly welcome and applaud this approach.

Barriers

Respondents were asked to indicate the most significant barriers they saw as standing in the way of achieving their desired aspirations.

Interestingly, four dominant barriers emerged, standing head and shoulders above all others (see Figure 3), namely:

- (1) Senior management understanding and support;
- (2) Lack of budget;
- (3) Cultural brick wall between your contact centre and the rest of the organisation; and
- (4) Insufficient in-house skills in business management techniques.

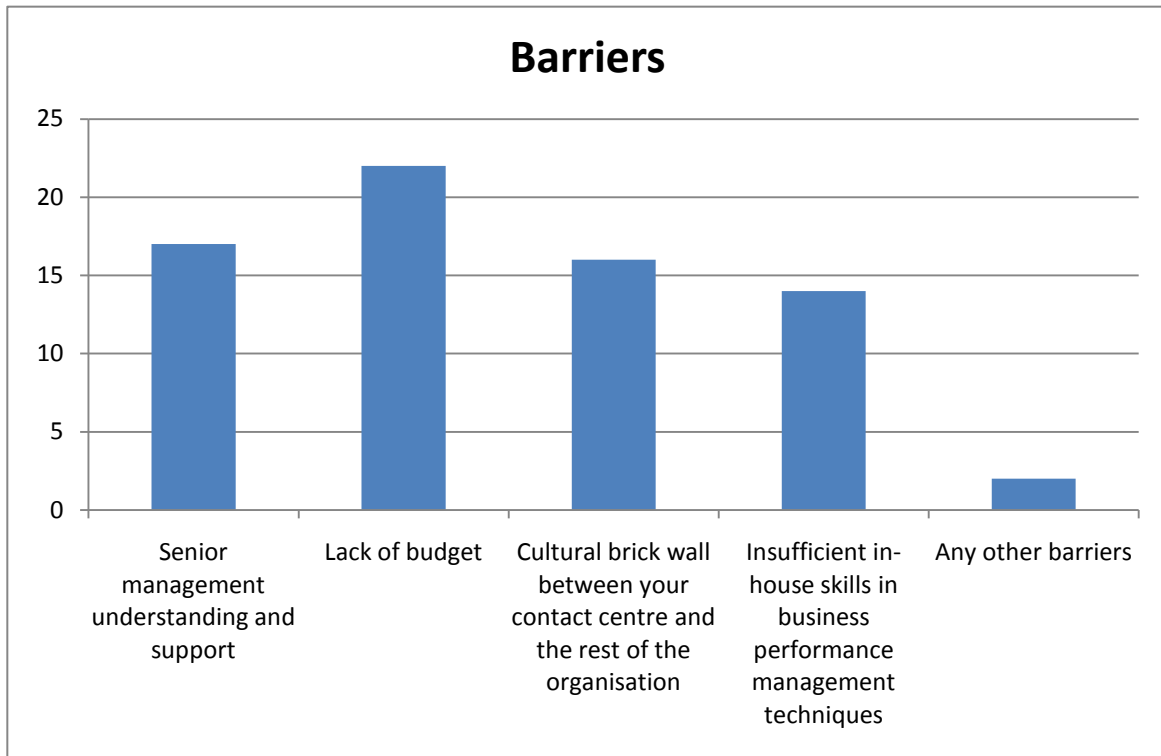


Figure 3. Barriers to Overcome

In our experience, each of these barriers can be overcome. Here are some hints and tips that may be helpful:

1. Senior management understanding and support

One powerful way to help senior managers see things differently is by capturing data on unwanted and potentially avoidable contacts – everything from contacts prompted by problems created outside the contact centre to repeat calls caused by inadequate contact handling processes.

2. Lack of budget

In austere times, budget restrictions are only to be expected. This means that proposed improvement initiatives need to be evaluated rigorously against anticipated net returns. The good news is that sensibly-designed PM&M initiatives typically pay back in far less than 12 months.

3. Cultural brick wall between your contact centre and the rest of the organisation

Addressing this issue typically requires contact centres to 'earn the right' to participate in decision-making at executive level. Improving the management process within contact centres can enable their true value to be more widely understood.

4. Insufficient in-house skills in business management techniques

The best way to address perceived deficiencies in in-house skills is not necessarily to involve external consultants. The key question is how to change senior management thinking. Sometimes this can be achieved internally but often it requires the injection of fresh specialist thinking from outside.

Conclusions

As consulting organisations specialising in helping contact centres improve performance, we know the value of taking a holistic, organisation-wide approach.

In this context, it is good to see from our survey findings the clear appetite to make significant progress in this field, not only changing current thinking but also recognising the key barriers standing in the way of progress.

In today's fast moving world, success is most likely to go to those contact centres who act most quickly and decisively in this field. Why so? Because improving the way performance is measured and managed in contact centres is typically the quickest, least expensive improvement option available, especially when compared with investments in software, technical infrastructure or business re-engineering programmes.

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